### Directions

One debater is yellow, the other is green. Read the speech as smoothly as you can, alternating voices back and forth.

### Drill

#### Obama’s speech from 2008.

Obama 8 — Michelle Obama, 2008 (http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/onpolitics/2016/07/19/melania-trump-republican-convention-speech-plagiarism/87278088/)

And Barack and I were raised with so many of the same values: that you work hard for what you want in life; that your word is your bond and you do what you say you're going to do; that you treat people with dignity and respect, even if you don't know them, and even if you don't agree with them.

And Barack and I set out to build lives guided by these values, and to pass them on to the next generation. Because we want our children — and all children in this nation — to know that the only limit to the height of your achievements is the reach of your dreams and your willingness to work for them.

#### Trump’s speech from 2016.

Trump 16 — Melania Trump, 2016 (http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/onpolitics/2016/07/19/melania-trump-republican-convention-speech-plagiarism/87278088/)

From a young age, my parents impressed on me the values that you work hard for what you want in life, that your word is your bond and you do what you say and keep your promise, that you treat people with respect.

They taught and showed me values and morals in their daily lives. That is a lesson that I continue to pass along to our son. And we need to pass those lessons on to the many generations to follow. Because we want our children in this nation to know that the only limit to your achievements is the strength of your dreams and your willingness to work for them.

#### Plagiarism is bad. Sad!

Renstrom 16 — Joelle Renstrom, Instructor in the Arts and Sciences Writing Program at Boston University, 2016 (“As a teacher, I know plagiarism when I see it,” *The Guardian*, July 19th, Available Online at <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/jul/19/plagiarism-signs-education-melania-trump>, Accessed 07-20-2016)

As a writing teacher at Boston University I can usually detect plagiarism. When you read someone’s writing week after week, sometimes all it takes is a suspiciously elegant turn of phrase or a sophisticated syntactical structure to raise a red flag.

Most students know about the perils of plagiarism by the time they get to college. Others may not. They ask legitimate questions, such as: “If so-and-so made her point so well, why should I put it in my own words?” And the answer, of course, is that you don’t have to.

If something is powerfully or perfectly put, use it – just be sure to cite it. Quotation marks are small symbols, but they mean a lot. A bibliography comes at the end of the paper, but that doesn’t make it an afterthought. Otherwise, one would assume the student wrote those perfect words, that they’re a product of the student’s brain. Plagiarism is generally regarded as the most egregious form of academic misconduct, and those who crib others’ words can get expelled.

Set aside the awkwardness of being accused of plagiarism in a speech about values. Forget that it’s unclear who wrote the speech – Melania Trump told Matt Lauer she did, but now that things have gone south the campaign communications team has taken responsibility. Never mind that were the shoe on the other foot, Michelle Obama would be ceaselessly maligned with both partisan smears and racial ones. Let’s focus on one simple fact: plagiarizing is lying. If it turns out the Melania Trump speech is guilty of that, then that’s pretty serious, regardless of whether it was written by her or a speechwriter.

After I confront a student about plagiarism, I generally get one of three responses. 1) I didn’t know or understand I was plagiarizing; 2) I didn’t plagiarize; or 3) I plagiarized (even if unintentionally), and I’m sorry.

“I didn’t know” doesn’t fly. Even the students who didn’t understand plagiarism before my class quickly learn about it during discussions, exercises, example reviews and links to online self-tests and plagiarism checkers. I never accuse a student of plagiarizing unless I have proof, almost always in the form of sources easily found by Googling a few choice phrases. For college students, the internet is both the best and the worst thing to happen to research papers. It’s so easy to lift passages, but so easy to get caught.

We’ve all got access to videos and transcripts of previous speeches, and with the help of sharp journalists with long memories and social media, it’s easy to prove plagiarism outside the classroom. By now, you’ve probably seen side-by-side transcripts or videos that show not just that the words used were “common words”, as Paul Manafort, Trump’s campaign manager, asserts. It strikes me that they are the same words.

Trump’s speechwriter, Jason Miller, has said that Melania’s speech included “fragments that reflected her own thinking”. Exactly. That’s the definition of plagiarism: taking fragments of someone else’s work and passing it off as one’s own. If it turns out that Michelle Obama’s speech reflected Melania’s thoughts, Melania should acknowledge it.

The Trump campaign calls the charges of plagiarism “absurd” and “crazy”, as though this has all been cooked up. But, as an educator, there are all sorts of parallels with plagiarism that I’ve dealt with in my own classroom. If Melania Trump were my student, we’d be meeting with the dean this morning and she’d be getting an “F” in my class.

The Trump campaign says that the stakes were too high for something like this to happen, that no one would deliver a plagiarized speech “in front of 35 million people.” But my students often say to me, “this paper’s worth 50% of my grade – I would never have plagiarized.” That makes the plagiarism even more mind-boggling, but it doesn’t make it not plagiarism.

And the kicker: it’s Clinton’s fault. Apparently, this is what happens “when a woman threatens Hillary Clinton”. I’m wary of scapegoating – I see it all the time when I call out plagiarism. “You’re doing this because you don’t like me,” students sometimes say. But I’m not the one who plagiarized. I’m the one whose job it is to assess students’ work, to hold them accountable not just for substance and style, but for ethical behavior.

In this case, we – all of us who care about the future of the United States and who care about truth – are the assessors. It doesn’t matter that Melania Trump or the campaign speechwriter isn’t enrolled in class, trying to get a good grade. Plagiarism is an even more serious offense outside of the classroom, when people are trying to sell themselves and their values – especially their honesty and integrity – to those who would take their lead.

Just like with my students, accepting responsibility for plagiarism is preferable to denying responsibility. In this case, denial of obvious wrongdoing is a lie upon a lie. Regardless of whether or not the similarity between the two speeches was an honest mistake, the Trump campaign should own it – with an honest apology.